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Annual ministerial review: implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to gender equality and empowerment of women

Statement submitted by International Association of Applied Psychology, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 30 and 31 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2010/100.

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Statement

Grass-roots preparation for women's right to work

The right to work is important in and of itself in times of crisis and prosperity alike. Despite progress in many regions, fewer women participate in paid work than men. The International Labour Organization (ILO) has shown that access to labour markets and to decent work remain particularly limited for women. Women disproportionately are represented in informal work and concentrated in informal contract work in many parts of the world; this is so especially in developing regions where they remain outside the labour force completely. This is not by choice. Women would work in legitimate paid jobs rather than participate in fringe and non-economic activities if they had a choice. They are limited not only by the lack of jobs but also by other factors, including exploitation by those who benefit from poor women, such as gangs, money lenders, and by the feudal and gender hierarchy and caste systems.

The International Association of Applied Psychology believes this system can be changed by the development of grass-roots advocacy groups to work with poor women to help them to develop organizational, advocacy and leadership skills that will allow them to overcome impediments to finding paid work or developing their own entrepreneurial businesses. These grass-roots type of organizations have been successful in many parts of the world and we advocate the development of such groups under the advocacy of the Economic and Social Council.

The grass-roots groups are developed around shared experiences or identities, including religious groups; a particular life status such as single motherhood; treatment for a specific illness such as HIV; widowhood; a civic interest; or an interest in child-rearing. The groups under the direction of a local trained leader teach the organizational, advocacy and leadership skills related to the reason for the group formation and then generalize these skills to the world of work. The skills are taught based on their own life experiences. For example, an organization called Lideres Campesinas developed these skills among indigenous women farm workers. They were trained to recognize their own inherent skills by asking them to describe situations in which they organized parties, dinners and other family events. They asked them whether they ever advocated for a child, friend, parent or family member to achieve something for them. They demystified leadership for them by showing them how they displayed it in everyday encounters. Once they recognized these skills, they could generalize them to other situations such as gaining employment, withstanding exploitation, asserting themselves in their families and community and even developing their own businesses.

This procedure could be established in all parts of the world and individuals could be trained to develop and lead such groups. It is likely that once the process is started it will spread throughout the community and include greater numbers of women to be empowered. We believe the Economic and Social Council should explore developing these grass-roots groups in the coming year.